

Bureau of Land Management

Bishop Field Office

Draft Fire Management Plan

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Prepared by
Bishop Field Office
Resources, Recreation and Fire Management
Specialists

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I. Introduction

A. Purpose

The purpose of this Fire Management Plan (FMP) is to incorporate newly developed fire and fuels management strategies and tactics into a document which supports the land and resource management goals and objectives of the Bishop Field Office Resource Management Plan (RMP) of 1993. In addition, to comply with the Federal Wildland Fire Management Plan Policy and Program Review (1995 and 2001) and the National Fire Plan's A Collaborative Approach for Reducing Wildland Fire Risks to Communities and the Environment: 10-Year Comprehensive Strategy and Implementation Plan (2002), all federal lands with burnable vegetation must be covered under an approved FMP. A Glossary of Terms is provided at the end of this document to assist in clarifying technical terms.

B. Environmental Regulation Compliance

The Bishop Field Office RMP Decision Record was signed in March 1993, and met the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements, as well as other State and Federal regulatory requirements. This FMP is a programmatic document which consolidates land and resource management decisions related to fire and fuels management from the RMP. The FMP then describes the fire and fuels management strategies to be used to fulfill RMP direction. In addition, the FMP applies a science-based understanding of the role fire plays in various ecosystems and the effects of long-term fire exclusion in fire-adapted ecosystems. The FMP also considers recent national direction and legislation which stresses public and firefighter safety, hazardous fuels reduction, and community protection from wildland fire. The FMP prescribes additional land and resource management strategies and treatments to meet this recent direction. To fully incorporate the FMP as a programmatic element of the RMP and comply with NEPA, an Environmental Assessment (EA) and Decision Record will be prepared, amending the RMP. Project plans will be prepared and an appropriate level of environmental analysis will be conducted before site-specific treatments prescribed by the FMP are implemented.

C. Collaboration with Other Agencies and Groups

The geographic scope of this FMP includes only Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands administered by the Bishop Field Office. To promote interagency coordination and efficiency at the planning stage, these BLM lands have been consolidated into a larger geographically and administratively logical area defined as the Fire Planning Unit (FPU). This FPU includes much of the Federal land within California and east of the Sierra Nevada, from Topaz Lake in the north, to just south of Owens Lake in the south.

The National Directives, identified in the Purpose section above, mandates that all federal agencies managing public lands complete a FMP. The BLM's FMP development will include coordination and collaboration with affected federal, state, and local agencies, groups, and organizations. Local communities and Native American tribes will be consulted as well.

Most land in and adjoining the FPU are publicly administered - - - either by the U.S. Forest Service, the National Park Service, or different administrative units of the BLM. Remaining lands are managed by the State of California and the City of Los Angeles' Dept. of Water and Power, with isolated rural communities, Native American reservations, and subdivision tracts sprinkled throughout the region. Over 90% of the land in the FPU is administered by public agencies. The land ownership complexity of the fire-prone public lands in the region necessitates a collaborative and coordinated approach with respective agencies to manage fire effectively and efficiently. Additionally, coordination with Native American representatives, rural community fire district personnel, and county fire representatives to safeguard private property and life has been incorporated within this FMP's development.

Lands administered by the following agencies and Native American tribes are within or adjacent to the FPU:

- Bureau of Land Management – Bishop Field Office
- Bureau of Land Management – Ridgecrest Field Office
- Bureau of Land Management – Carson City District Office
- Inyo National Forest
- Toiyabe National Forest – Bridgeport Ranger District
- National Park Service – Manzanar National Historic Site
- National Park Service – Devil's Postpile National Monument
- Calif. State Parks - Bodie State Historic Park
- Calif. Dept. of Fish and Game
- Calif. Dept. of Forestry
- Los Angeles Department of Water and Power
- Washo Tribe
- Coleville Tribe
- Bridgeport Indian Colony
- Mono Lake Indian Community
- Benton Paiute Reservation
- Bishop Indian Tribal Council
- Big Pine Band of the Owens Valley
- Fort Independence Band of Paiute Indians
- Lone Pine Paiute – Shoshone Reservation
- Timbisha Shoshone Tribe

The Bishop Field Office and Inyo National Forest operate an interagency fire program. Personnel from each agency have attended FMP meetings, and are very familiar with the other agency's plans. FMU boundaries and fire management strategies have been examined to assure compatibility between the two agencies. Joint fire suppression and fuels reduction have been occurring for several years. In addition to collaborative implementation, planning of landscape-level inter-agency projects is expected to increase.

Written correspondence has occurred between the Bishop Field Office and National Park Service representatives at Manzanar National Historic Site and Devil's Postpile National Monument. BLM lands in the vicinity of Manzanar will be managed similarly to those lands within the Historic Site. The FMPs for both agencies recognize the importance of protecting the Historic Site from wildland fire. Opportunities exist for collaborative efforts to reduce hazardous fuels and provide better protection for the Historic Site. All documentation of correspondence is located in the FMP casefiles in Bishop.

Lands managed by the Bishop Field Office and those managed by the National Park Service at Devil's Postpile are widely separated geographically, and have little in common. Opportunities for collaboration are minimal.

In the past, the Bishop Field Office has collaborated with Bodie State Park personnel to share resources, perspectives, provide fire-related training and equipment, etc. The Bishop Field Office manages most of the public lands which surround the ghost town of Bodie. Bodie State Park's isolation and distance have made it necessary to equip State Park personnel with training, skills and equipment to initiate pre-suppression measures and fire suppression tactics until BLM fire personnel and equipment arrive.

D. Authorities

Authority is delegated from the Secretary of the Interior to the Director of the Bureau of Land Management for the operation of a fire management program on public lands under the jurisdiction of the Bureau. Departmental Manual 910 and BLM Manual 9200 codify this delegation of authority.

Additionally, this FMP has been developed to fully comply with the following legislative efforts:

- The Protection Act of 1922
- The Taylor Grazing Act of 1934
- The Reciprocal Fire Protection Act of 1955
- The Multiple Use-Sustained Yield Act of 1960
- The Wilderness Act of 1964
- The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966
- The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968
- The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969
- The Endangered Species Act of 1973

- The Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974
- The Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976
- The Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003

II. Relationship to Fire Policy and Land Management Planning

A. Relationship to Fire Policy

This FMP adheres to the following established fire policy:

- BLM Manual Section 1740 and BLM Manual Handbook H-1740-1 – provide guidance and procedures for management and treatment of renewable resources, including utilization of management prescribed fire and emergency fire rehabilitation.
- BLM Manual Section 1752 – provides guidance for emergency fire rehabilitation. Emergency fire rehabilitation measures to prevent accelerated soil erosion and establishment of noxious weeds are incorporated. Fire line rehabilitation would include restoration of surface contours and closure to vehicles.
- 43 CFR 9212.0-6 Policy - It is the policy of the BLM to take all necessary actions to protect human life, the public lands and the resources and improvements thereon through the prevention of wildfires. Wherever possible, the Bureau of Land Management's actions will complement and support State and local wildfire prevention actions.
- October 2000, National Cohesive Strategy - goal is to coordinate an aggressive, collaborative approach to reduce the threat of wildland fire to communities and to restore and maintain land health (www.fireplan.gov).
- August 2001, Collaborative Approach for Reducing Wildland Fire Risks to Communities and the Environment -10 Year Comprehensive Strategy and May 2002, Collaborative Approach for Reducing Wildland Fire Risks to Communities and the Environment, 10 Year Comprehensive Strategy – Implementation Plan - provide a suite of core principles and four goals. The core principles include the concepts of collaboration, priority setting, and accountability. The four goals are:
 1. Improve Prevention and Suppression
 2. Reduce Hazardous Fuels
 3. Restore Fire Adapted Ecosystems
 4. Promote Community Assistance

The strategy provides a foundation for wildland agencies to work closely with all levels of government, tribes, conservation, and commodity groups and community-based restoration groups to reduce wildland fire risk to communities and the environment.

- Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations - describes policy and operations for all fire related activities in the DOI and USDA, as amended annually.

Additionally, the 2001 Review and Update of the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy states:

1. Safety - Firefighter and Public Safety is the first priority. All Fire Management Plans and activities must reflect this commitment.
2. Fire Management and Ecosystem Sustainability-The full range of fire management activities will be used to help achieve ecosystem sustainability, including its interrelated ecological and social components.
3. Response to Wildland Fire - Fire, as a critical natural process, will be integrated into land and resource management plans and activities on a landscape scale, and across agency boundaries. Response to wildland fire is based on ecological, social, and legal consequences of the fire. The circumstances under which a fire occurs, and the likely consequences on firefighter and public safety and welfare, natural and cultural resources, and values to be protected dictate the appropriate management response to the fire.
4. Use of Wildland Fire - Wildland fire will be used to protect, maintain, and enhance resources and, as nearly as possible, be allowed to function in its natural ecological role. Use of fire will be based on approved Fire Management Plans and will follow specific prescriptions contained in operational plans.
5. Rehabilitation and Restoration - Rehabilitation and restoration efforts will be undertaken to protect and sustain ecosystems, public health, and safety, and to help communities protect infrastructure.
6. Protection Priorities - The protection of human life is the single, overriding priority. Setting priorities among protecting human communities and community infrastructure, other property and improvements, and natural and cultural resources will be based on the values to be protected, human health and safety, and the costs of protection. Once people have been committed to an incident, these human resources become the highest value to be protected.
7. Wildland Urban Interface - The operational roles of federal agencies as partners in the Wildland Urban Interface are wildland firefighting, hazardous fuels reduction, cooperative prevention and education, and technical assistance. Structural fire suppression is the responsibility of tribal, State, or local governments. Federal agencies may assist with exterior structural protection activities under formal Fire Protection Agreements that specify mutual responsibilities of the partners, including funding. (Some federal agencies have full structural protection authority for their facilities on lands they administer, and may also enter into formal agreements to assist State and local governments with full structural protection.)

8. Planning - Every area with burnable vegetation must have an approved Fire Management Plan. Fire Management Plans are strategic plans that define a program to manage wildland and prescribed fires based on the area's approved land management plan. Fire Management Plans must provide for firefighter and public safety; include fire management strategies, tactics, and alternatives; address values to be protected and public health issues; and be consistent with resource management objectives, activities of the area, and environmental laws and regulations.
9. Science - Fire Management Plans and programs will be based on a foundation of sound science. Research will support on-going efforts to increase our scientific knowledge of biological, physical, and sociologic factors. Information needed to support fire management will be developed through an integrated interagency fire science program. Scientific results must be made available to managers in a timely manner and must be used in the development of land management plans, Fire Management Plans, and implementation plans.
10. Preparedness - Agencies will ensure their capabilities to provide safe, cost-effective fire management programs in support of land and resource management plans through appropriate planning, staffing, training, equipment, and management oversight.
11. Suppression - Fires are suppressed at minimum cost, considering firefighter and public safety, benefits, and values to be protected, consistent with resource objectives.
12. Prevention - Agencies will work together and with their partners and other affected groups and individuals to prevent unauthorized ignition of wildland fires.
13. Standardization - Agencies will use compatible planning processes, funding mechanisms, training and qualification requirements, operational procedures, values to be protected methodologies, and public education programs for all fire management activities.
14. Interagency Cooperation and Coordination - Fire management planning, preparedness, prevention, suppression, fire use, restoration and rehabilitation, monitoring, research, and education will be conducted on an interagency basis with the involvement of cooperators and partners.
15. Communication and Education - Agencies will enhance knowledge and understanding of wildland fire management policies and practices through internal and external communication and education programs. These programs will be continuously improved through the timely and effective exchange of information among all affected agencies and organizations.
16. Agency Administrator and Employee Roles - Agency administrators will ensure that their employees are trained, certified, and made available to participate in the wildland fire program locally, regionally, and nationally as the situation demands. Employees with operational, administrative, or other skills will support the wildland fire program as necessary. Agency administrators are responsible and will be held accountable for making employees available.

17. Evaluation - Agencies will adopt and implement a systematic method of evaluation to determine effectiveness of projects through implementation of the 2001 Federal Fire Policy. The evaluation will assure accountability, facilitate resolution of areas of conflict, and identify resource shortages and agency priorities.

B. Conformance with Bishop Field Office RMP

Under the “Area-Wide RMP Decisions” (p. 16 of the RMP Record of Decision (ROD)), the following fire management-related statements are listed as “Support Needs,” and are necessary to achieve many of the RMP’s other decisions:

- Modify the fire suppression plan to incorporate fire-related decisions. Include burn prescriptions to allow for the implementation of limited and modified suppression techniques (p.23, ROD).
- Use prescribed burning to support desired plant community, fire prevention and wildlife habitat goals (p.23, ROD).

This FMP specifically addresses and fulfills these needs.

The Bishop Field Office RMP contains the following “Area Manager’s Guidelines” (p. 9, ROD):

- Vegetation will be a key element in the plan and management will be directed toward the achievement of desired plant community goals (p.9, ROD).
- Rehabilitation of riparian areas will receive high priority for project implementation. Efforts will be made to return all watersheds in declining condition to equilibrium (p.9, ROD).
- Actions that interfere significantly with efforts to maintain or enhance mule deer winter range will generally not be allowed (p.9, ROD).
- Actions that interfere significantly with efforts to maintain or enhance sage grouse habitat will generally not be allowed (p.9, ROD).
- Fire management plans and policies will emphasize suppression cost reduction and fire prevention at the urban-wildland interface (p. 10, ROD).

This FMP supports and conforms to these guidelines.

The Bishop Field Office RMP contains the following “Standard Operating Procedures” (p. 10, ROD):

- Burned areas will be rested for three growing seasons before grazing (p. 12, ROD).
- Manage candidate species, sensitive species and other species of management concern in a manner to avoid the need for listing as a state or federal endangered or threatened species (p. 12, ROD).

This FMP supports and conforms to this direction.

The following fire management-related decisions are found in the “Area-Wide RMP Decisions” (p.16, ROD):

- Limit the intensity of fire suppression efforts to the most economical response consistent with human and resource values at risk (p. 22, ROD).

- Prohibit the use of bulldozers and other heavy equipment in old growth timber stands, prominent viewsheds, riparian areas, aspen groves, cultural sites, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs), mule deer winter ranges, the Alabama Hills, and the entire South Inyo and Owens Lake Management Areas. This restriction may be lifted by the Area Manager to protect human life, private property, structures, visitor safety or sensitive or valuable resources (p. 22, ROD).

This FMP supports and conforms to these decisions.

The following fire management-related decisions are specific to individual Management Areas, as described in the RMP.

- Protect and interpret the historic Golden Gate Mine site (p. 26, ROD).
- In the Bodie Hills Management Area, employ full fire suppression techniques against all wildfires (p. 33, ROD).
- Protect, stabilize and interpret the Salt Tram (p. 49, ROD).

This FMP supports and conforms to these decisions.

C. Wilderness/Wild and Scenic Rivers

The FMP will adhere to all wilderness rules, policies, and guidelines related to fire and fuels management for the Inyo Mountains Wilderness. This wilderness is managed by the Inyo National Forest, and the Bishop and Ridgecrest BLM Field Offices. This FMP will develop consistent overall fire and fuels management strategy for those portions of the Inyo Mountains Wilderness managed by the Bishop Field Office and the Inyo National Forest.

The Inyo National Forest fire policy for the Inyo Mountains Wilderness is “Wildland Fire Use,” i.e. allowing naturally ignited fires to burn under favorable conditions to enhance or maintain the wilderness’ ecological processes. This FMP also prescribes Wildland Fire Use for the Inyo Mountains Wilderness, consistent with the Forest Service and wilderness laws, regulations, and policy.

The Ridgecrest Field Office manages the east slope of the Inyo Mountains Wilderness. The Ridgecrest Field Office follows land use prescriptions identified in the California Desert Plan (1980) which directs “full suppression” actions for natural wildfires in wilderness. The California Desert Plan operates under a different timeline and planning cycle than this current planning effort. Therefore, it is recommended that the Ridgecrest Field Office update their FMP in their next planning cycle to be consistent with other agencies. Currently, a BLM Wilderness Implementation Strategy exists for the Inyo Mountains Wilderness.

A small portion of the Inyo Wilderness is managed by Death Valley National Park. This part adjoins the Ridgecrest Field Office and the Inyo National Forest wilderness portions.

Eighteen Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) totaling approximately 234,500 acres are located throughout the field office area. The treatment of WSAs and protection of their wilderness character will be addressed in this FMP similarly as to that described in the Final Bishop Field Office RMP/Final EIS (1991).

The RMP provides an historic overview of the wilderness review process and clarifies how protection of WSA characteristics will be addressed in the RMP. In conformance with the RMP, this plan will prescribe long term direction for fire and fuels management in the WSAs. Until the Congress and the president either designate these areas as wilderness or make them available to non-wilderness uses, FMP decisions and fire management actions will be implemented only if they are consistent with the Interim Management Policy for Lands under Wilderness Review (H-8550-1). In summary, WSAs as an issue will be dropped from further analysis in this plan.

Further analysis of impact to wilderness values will be addressed in upcoming project implementation plans and associated environmental documents.

Similarly, eleven wild and scenic study rivers that were determined eligible in the Bishop Field Office RMP are protected by interim management guidelines identified in Appendix 2 of the RMP (1991). Further analysis of impacts to riparian and waterway resource values will be analyzed in upcoming project implementation plans and associated environmental documents and are subject to protection under the interim management guidelines. As with the WSAs, any FMP decision will be implemented only if they are consistent with the guidelines for study rivers.

D. Areas of Critical Environmental Concerns

The FMP will also adhere to Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) prescriptions identified in completed ACEC activity plans. This includes the Fish Slough, Travertine, and Bodie Bowl ACECs.